DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 227 TM 035 324

AUTHOR	Ashford, Anne N.; Deering, Paul D.
TITLE	Middle Level Teacher Preparation: The Impact of the Portfolio Experience on Teachers' Professional Development.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Graduate Students; Graduate Study; *Middle School Teachers; *Portfolio Assessment; Portfolios (Background Materials); *Professional Development; *Standards

ABSTRACT

This study examined how participants in the Master's in Secondary Education with a Middle Level Emphasis Program (MLMED) at the University of Hawaii perceived their personal experiences with the portfolio process in shaping their middle level teacher preparation and professional practices. The process involved understanding a standards-based teacher portfolio, generating evidence or artifacts, discussing artifacts, sharing portfolio progress, generating reflective writing, defending the portfolio, and using the portfolio following program completion. The study used qualitative case methods that focused on the portfolio process for all 62 participants in the first two cohorts of MLMED. Participants completed electronic open-ended questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews. The study shows that the MLMED portfolio process promoted a deep understanding of the professional standards of middle level educators and teacher motivation to see themselves as effective agents in the larger picture of the school systems in which they work. The MLMED portfolio, as part of a process that includes sustained collegial support, leads to perceptions of improved professional practice and serves as an effective professional development model. (Contains 33 references.) (Author/SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Ashford

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 481 227

Middle Level Teacher Preparation: The Impact of the Portfolio Experience on Teachers' Professional Development

Anne N. Ashford, Ph.D.
Hawaii Department of Education
Leeward District
Honolulu, Hawaii
808 382-266
aashford@pixi.com

Paul D. Deering, Ph.D.
University of Hawaii at Manoa
College of Education
Honolulu, Hawaii
808 956-9993
deering@hawaii.edu

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association,
Chicago, Illinois,
April 2003

TM035324

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

This study examined how participants in the Masters in Secondary Education with a Middle Level Emphasis Program (MLMED) at the University of Hawai'i perceived their personal experiences with the portfolio process in shaping their middle level teacher preparation and professional practices. The process involved understanding a standards-based teacher portfolio, generating evidence or artifacts, discussing artifacts, sharing portfolio progress, generating reflective writing, defending the portfolio, and using the portfolio following program completion. This study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives of the participants regarding the effects of the Portfolio process on their professional practices?
2. Which features of the MLMED Portfolio most contribute to or inhibit professional growth?

This study used qualitative case methods that focused on the portfolio process, as framed by three criteria: a social unit (MLMED Cohort One and Cohort Two participants); the period of portfolio construction and use (starting in June of 1996 for Cohort One, to August, 2001 for both Cohorts); the experience of these two Cohorts with this process (constructing and using an exit portfolio). The sample included all of the 62 participants of MLMED Cohort One and Cohort Two; fifty-eight percent consented to participate in this study. Research instruments included electronic open-ended questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews.

This study reveals three major findings:

1. The MLMED portfolio process promotes: a deep understanding of the professional standards of middle level educators; and motivation for teachers to see themselves as effective agents in the larger picture of the school systems in which they work.

2. As part of a structured program that includes sustained collegial support, the MLMED portfolio leads to perceptions of improved professional practice: i.e., improved pedagogy, more adolescent-centered curricula, and leadership beyond the classroom.
3. The MLMED portfolio process is an effective professional development model, and aligns with criteria for effective professional development.

Subsequent to the portfolio experience, the participants' estimation of their professional capabilities grew and took form in their willingness to seek and assume more leadership roles.

"The single most important action the nation can take to improve schools is to strengthen teaching" (Lieberman & Miller, 2000).

Background

As we watched University of Hawai'i masters degree candidates work on their teacher portfolios, then share these portfolios at national and state education conferences, we could not help but wonder about the relationship that seemed to exist between the portfolio experience and the new enthusiasm these educators expressed for the professional standards that informed their work. In an era of rising interest in teacher performance, the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), and questions about the effectiveness of various avenues of professional development, this study explores the potential of the portfolio for the professional development of middle grades (5-9) educators.

When teacher education programs require exit portfolios from their graduates, both the graduates and the schools of education know the extent to which these teachers have achieved program standards. According to Lyons (1998), "portfolios hold the possibility of becoming a new kind of credential of competent and effective teachers" (p. vii), and for beginning as well as experienced teachers, potentially a new norm for teacher assessment (Wolf, 1999; Wyatt & Looper, 1999). This study examines more specifically how the portfolio experience required of Masters in Secondary Education with a Middle Level emphasis (MLMED) degree candidates led to their understanding of and ability to meet professional standards for middle level educators.

For the past five years, the MLMED at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa's College of Education has required a portfolio as an exit requirement for graduation. Throughout the seven semesters of course work, candidates (referred to as participants in this study) build their Portfolios* as evidence of competence in accordance with explicit Program Standards* (P. D. Deering et al., 1999).

---

* Portfolio, Program, and Standards will refer specifically to the MLMED Portfolio, Program, and Standards and portfolio, program, and standards to all others.

The Portfolio requirement has been a demanding yet rewarding one for the participants, as well as the MLMED faculty. Data have indicated that the Portfolio process has had a profound impact on the professional and teaching practices of those enrolled in the Program" (P. D. Deering, 1997).

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives of the participants regarding the effects of the Portfolio process on their professional practices?
2. Which features of the MLMED Portfolio most contribute to or inhibit professional growth?

Literature on teacher standards, the MLMED Program, teacher portfolios, and teacher professional development informed this study. A brief overview of each follows.

Middle Level Teacher Standards

The preparation and development of middle level teachers provides the most reliable way to ensure the existence of developmentally appropriate middle school programs (Jackson & Davis, 2000; National Middle School Association, 1995). Jackson and Davis (2000) describe the pre-service preparation and professional development of middle grades teachers:

- A strong conceptual grasp of their academic disciplines and skills in developing and using assessments to guide instructional decisions
- Instructional knowledge and skills grounded in how people learn best
- An understanding of how effective interdisciplinary teams work and how they can best contribute to effective teams
- Substantial comprehension of young adolescents' developmental characteristics and needs
- Willingness and the preparation to participate actively in the school's governance system
- Knowledge and skills to support a safe and healthy school environment

• Capacity to engage parents and community members in support of students and the school (p. 96)

The above list aligns with national standards set forth for all levels of teaching and teacher preparation; middle level teacher preparation programs (National Middle School Association, 1997), beginning teachers (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2000), and accomplished teachers (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1987). Each national organization has established that accomplished teachers should be knowledgeable about their content, and use multiple, effective strategies for instruction and assessment. They should also understand their students and maintain a healthy and safe learning environment. Finally, accomplished teachers should be professionally involved in their schools and engage the school community to support student learning and well-being.

MLMED

The University of Hawai'i College of Education offered its first Masters in Secondary Education with a Middle Level Emphasis (MLMED) in the summer of 1996 for the purpose of developing a cadre of highly knowledgeable educators of early adolescents (10-15 year olds) who would engage in renewal of their own practice and provide leadership within and beyond their schools (P. D. Deering, 1998). The MLMED Program is designed to promote the ideals of the National Middle School Association (NMSA) (National Middle School Association, 1995) and recommendations of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) and is organized by professional standards, operated via three Program strands, and assessed by a Portfolio of work.

A comprehensive set of five professional standards for teachers of early adolescents the *Professional Standards for Teachers of Early Adolescents* (P.D. Deering & Port, 1995) (see Appendix) ground the MLMED Program and require competence with and inquiry into:

1. The nature of early adolescents and middle level education
2. Subject area content, pedagogy and integration

3. Developmentally-appropriate curriculum, instruction and assessment for diverse learners
4. Communication, counseling, classroom management and group dynamics strategies
5. Professionalism and leadership

Three Program strands frame the MLMED: effective practice, reflection and collaborative assessment, and leadership within the professional community (P. D. Deering et al., 1999). To accomplish this, the MLMED Program uses several middle level practices. One is to establish small communities of learners which is accomplished through the Cohort structure, that parallels a middle level team, and smaller homebase groups each with a faculty advisor, much like middle level advisory groups. The common core of MLMED classes is similar to a middle school academic core, and the cognate courses are similar to the middle level exploratory program. The multi-disciplinary faculty provides integrated coursework, close faculty-student guidance, and serves as advisors for their homebase groups. Additionally, the Program faculty models effective te ing and assessment practice, and provides an active, authentic exploratory curriculum throughout the coursework. Professional leadership is key to the MLMED Program and participants are expected to participate in advancing middle level reform efforts.

To date, three cohorts of approximately 33 teachers have graduated. A fourth cohort will graduate in summer of 2004. Table 1 shows the racial diversity of the cohorts as well as representation from outlying and low-income schools. Of particular note is the high graduation rate of the participants, in spite of the fact that almost 20% of each cohort enters on academic probation.

Table 1
Characteristics of MLMED[1] Participants by Cohort

Characteristic	Cohort			
Personal	1	2	3	Mean
Underrepresented Ethnicities: Hawaiian/Part-Hawaiian, Filipino/a, Latino/a, Native American, other Pacific Islander[2]	29%	27%	25%	27%
Japanese, Chinese, Korean Ancestry	53%	50%	53%	52%
European Ancestry / Caucasian	18%	23%	22%	21%
Over age 35 entering program	63%	59%	40%	54%
School				
From Distant/Outlying Schools	35%	33%	31%	33%
From Low-Income Schools[3]	57%	21%	36%	38%
Academic				
Entered Under Academic Probation	20%	14%	20%	17%
Graduation Rate	94%	90%	NA[4]	92%

Note:
1. MLMED = Master of Secondary Education Degree with a Middle Level Emphasis Program
2. Ethnic groups underrepresented in teaching force = Hawaiian/Part-Hawaiian, Filipino/a, Latino/a, Native American, other Pacific Islander; majority of Hawai'i teachers are Japanese American (~60%) and European American (~25%) with proportional representation of Chinese Americans and Korean Americans
3. Low-income schools = ≥ 33% of students on free/reduced-cost lunches
4. Cohort 3 is still in the program; two participants have moved out of state, one has dropped out and three are on hiatus—two due to maternity (total inactive = 16% of entering cohort).

To support the Program strands goals, the MLMED requires a Portfolio of work as an exit requirement. The Portfolio process is designed to achieve two goals: to empower participants to direct, reflect upon, and apply their learning; and to provide evidence of these accomplishments for the purpose of formative and summative assessment (P. D. Deering et al., 1999). The Portfolio assessment is used instead of a traditional thesis in order to provide students with a great deal of control over their development and evaluation, allowing them to build their own cases for proficiency relative to the five Program Standards (P. D. Deering, 1998).

Portfolios

Wolf and Dietz (1998) define a teaching portfolio as "a structured collection of teacher and student work created across diverse contexts over time, framed by reflection and enriched through collaboration, that has as its ultimate aim the advancement of student and teacher learning" (p.13). Portfolio contents reflect the diverse roles and responsibilities of an educator and the portfolio provides a way to display multiple sources of evidence of one's practice. The consciousness implicit in the choice of artifacts leads teachers to reflect on what they want the portfolio to represent. Thought and reflection as to why that particular item should be included in the portfolio represents one of it's more significant contributions to teacher education (Lyons, 1998a).

Portfolios are being used at all levels of teacher development; teacher preparation programs require them of their graduates; Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) uses portfolios to evaluate beginning teachers; state teacher licensing board often require portfolios for re-licensing; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) uses portfolios to award National Board Teacher Certification to accomplished veteran teachers. The benefits of teaching portfolios raise questions regarding changes that occur during a teacher's formative stages of portfolio development, how experienced teachers use portfolios to develop professionally, and what classroom benefits derive for both teachers and students from portfolio use (Lyons, 1998b).

Professional Development

The dynamics of teaching and the ongoing demand for professional development have led to new models that engage teachers with their colleagues, focus on school issues, and involve self evaluation and reflection (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Danielson and McGreal (2000) suggest that professional development models that improve teaching have the following characteristics:

- Stimulate and support site-based initiatives
- Are grounded in knowledge about teaching.

- Offer intellectual, social, and emotional engagement with ideas, materials, and colleagues
- Demonstrate respect for teachers as professionals and as adult learners.
- Provide sufficient time and follow-up support for teachers to master new content and strategies and to integrate them into their practice (p. 16)

Stimulating and supporting site-based initiatives involves connecting professional development directly to participants' teaching, the context of their classrooms, and reform efforts of the school (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Professional development should be based on effective practices that include modeling the practice and providing direct experiences with them. Deep understanding requires engagement and struggle with the new ideas in a collaborative community of learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Professional development should acknowledge teachers' expertise and provide ways for them to share and build on what they know. For teachers to internalize new information, they require time to try-out, reflect on, and adapt their practice, which necessitates on-going coaching and collaborative problem-solving (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

In summary, a portfolio is a useful way for teachers to reflect on and portray their practice, and holds the potential to advance professional development. The time, reflection, and discourse involved in the portfolio process contribute to its effectiveness as a means of professional development. Research on the portfolio process and what changes occur for the teacher as well as students is needed.

Methods

A constructivist research paradigm framed this study. It allowed the participants to use their knowledge and perspectives to construct a personally meaningful understanding of the Portfolio process (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Marzano, 2000). This study used qualitative case methods to describe perspectives of the MLMED participants of the influence of the Portfolio process on their professional practices, how they made sense out of the experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The research questions suggest that there likely are professional benefits due to the Portfolio process (Freidus, 1998; Grant & Heubner, 1998; Lyons, 1998c; Wolf, 1999). This is supported by anecdotal evidence from the MLMED faculty as well as participants. Factors other than the Portfolio warrant consideration, however, and case study is an appropriate method to use when trying to go beyond exploring or describing, for example in searching for causal relationships (Yin, 1993).

It was important to consider how a variety of variables embedded in the MLMED Program might also contribute to improved professional practice. The cohorted structure of the Program, with participants studying together in a two year-three summer Program had the potential to impact perspectives on professional development, and therefore, research results. The home base arrangement of the cohort, the pairing of a group of six to seven students with a faculty advisor for the duration of the Program, could promote professional development. The faculty's personal and professional attributes could be factors in motivating the professional development of the Program participants. The middle level education standards selected for the Portfolio hold the potential to influence professional development. There are several aspects of the Portfolio process, such as collaboration, reflection, and defense that may contribute to the participants' professional development.

Many variables have the potential to influence MLMED participants' perspectives of their professional development both during and following graduation. These complex components warrant exploration and "the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). In this case, the phenomenon is the Portfolio process that is imbedded in the MLMED Program.

This case study is bounded by the Portfolio experiences of the MLMED Cohorts One and Two. The emphasis of the research is on the features of the Portfolio process that contribute to participants' perspectives of improved professional practice. Data patterns were identified from the questionnaire,

focus groups, and individual interviews. Interpretation of the data was triangulated using the three separate instruments.

Data sources

All participants of the MLMED Cohort One and Cohort Two, a potential sample of 62 were included in the study. Data were collected via open-ended electronic questionnaire, focus groups, and individual interviews.

The three data collection methods used in this case study helped gather multiple perspectives as well as triangulate the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Morse & Field, 1995).

A short-answer, open-ended questionnaire, sent to each participant in Cohort One and Two was used to gain wide perspectives on the Portfolio process (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). This method is appropriate in cases where some of the constructs are known, as they are in the case of teacher portfolios. There is a substantial preexisting research base on teacher portfolios, so the vocabulary of portfolio work has been established, and was familiar to the sample (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The short-answer, open-ended questionnaire provided freedom for respondents, and therefore the data were more likely to be meaningful and valid (Morse & Field, 1995). The questionnaire was pilot tested and critiqued (Johnson & Christensen, 2000) by four participants not in the sample, however, they were participants in Cohort Three, and involved with the Portfolio process.

Information gathered from the questionnaires helped establish questions for the second method of data collection, focus groups. The focus group was used to develop deeper group perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2000) about the Portfolio process. The relative homogeneity of the focus group participants, one from each Cohort, helped reduce personal risk and promoted self-disclosure (Morse & Field, 1995).

The focus group results helped inform the interviews. The individual interviews were used to explore the extremes in questionnaire responses, two from each cohort who indicated either high or low use of their Portfolio. Although the data analysis was based on all three instruments, the interviews provided the best in-depth information for the individual cases (Creswell, 1998).

Fifty-eight percent of the participants returned the electronic questionnaire: 51.5% (17/33) of respondents from Cohort One; 65% (19/29) from Cohort Two. A 60% response rate in survey research is considered good for analyzing and reporting (Babbie, 2001). Background information suggests that respondents were representative of the larger MLMED Program in the following ways:

- participants represent each of the six advisors' homebase teams;
- a similar percentage of male and female participants;
- a similar number of representatives from public and private schools;
- a similar distribution of classroom and resource teachers, and counselors;
- a distribution of participant ages, years of teaching experience, and years teaching at middle level;
- a similar distribution of participants having or not having MLMED colleagues at their schools.

Background information from the questionnaires indicated that the participants were veteran middle level teachers who average fifteen years of teaching, with a high of 35 years and a low of 3. Only one of the respondents had taught for less than 5 years. Of the 36 respondents, 29 had taught for more than ten years. Half of the group had spent their entire teaching career at the middle level.

Data from electronic questionnaires, focus groups and interviews were coded and analyzed in three different ways, according to emergent themes, the MLMED standards, and professional development criteria (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). A final round of analysis generated three profiles for a case analysis. Disconfirming evidence was sought via member checks of the questionnaire results,

follow-up questions to focus group and interview participants, and scrutinizing the data for alternative insights by generating a variety of data displays (Huberman & Miles, 1998).

Results

This study yielded three important findings: 1) participants felt they had a deep understanding of the professional standards for middle level educators; 2) participants felt that over time, the Portfolio process led to their improved professional practice both in and beyond the classroom; 3) the Portfolio process aligns with effective professional development criteria.

Deep Understanding of Professional Standards for Middle Level Educators

The Standards defined accomplished practice and became a motivation for teachers to see themselves as effective agents in the larger picture of the school system in which they work. Participants felt the Program Standards were comprehensive and thorough, and they worked hard to construct their own understanding of the standards and appreciated what they represented. One participant reflected on the impact of the Standards:

> I believe that the Standards focus on the needs of the middle school student as well as the needs of what a professional should have or should be teaching in this level of kids. Makes you stand back and take a close look at your teaching practices and philosophy of teaching. Does it align with the needs of students in this age level? (Q #32 C2).*

Improved Practice In and Beyond the Classroom

A second finding was that participants felt that over time, the Portfolio process led to their improved professional practice both in and beyond the classroom. Participants frequently cited a more adolescent centered curriculum, improved pedagogy, and leadership beyond the classroom as changes in

---

* Quotations are coded Q for questionnaire, FG for focus group, Int for individual interview. # to indicate participant code, and C1 for Cohort One and C2 for Cohort Two.

their professional practice due to their Portfolio work. One participant explained the effect of the Portfolio, four years after completing it:

> I do not physically utilize the Portfolio today, but the process and the Standards are with me daily. The Portfolio is symbolic of what's important when working with adolescents, colleagues, and the community. I remind myself to reflect on my teaching, and ask myself for the rationale for what I do. The Portfolio is a reminder to be student centered, to respect diversity, to include multicultural education, and to always strive for higher standards (Q #33 C1).

Adolescent Centered

Participants indicated that they developed more compassion for the emerging adolescent. They began to understand the physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and moral changes that this age group faces. Several teachers expressed how this became the new "filter" for their curricular decisions and one wrote:

> Sometimes I would have to create lessons that ran with my curriculum but would also satisfy a Standard. Made me reflect on what I was teaching and the importance to the students. Also, made me reflect in areas such as differentiation and accommodating students with special needs. It also made me look at the whole child, not just the student. How did the student feel about themselves, their environment, their peers? Where did the student fit in? How could the student fit in? (Q #6 C1).

Improved Pedagogy

Participants felt that their teaching practice changed as a result of creating their MLMED Portfolio. One participant explained how he used a variety of active learning strategies to develop students' thinking, problem-solving and learning skills:

> It effected my classroom practice tremendously! I became more reflective. I involved students a lot more in the development and planning of what we learned. I tried new strategies that were

shared by other cohort members. I connected practice with theory and was better able to examine why I did things and how I might do what I did more effectively (Q #28 C1).

Participants reported that they began to use developmentally appropriate activities to promote student success. One participant explained how the awareness of the importance of keeping students actively engaged altered her teaching:

> I became more aware of the need to keep students actively engaged. I think that I have been more willing to try different things in class and to allow the students to do more things to enhance their learning (whether they believe that or not!) (Q #12 C1).

Participants also reported that the Portfolio process gave them guidelines to monitor their teaching activities. The requirement to provide evidence of using certain classroom practices:

> . . . the Portfolio process was a huge influence on my classes because I needed to "show" that I was using varied strategies and evaluate how those strategies were working, especially in those areas that I needed to strengthen my skills, I was able to utilize the Portfolio guidelines as a basis for new practices (Q #21 C1).

Participants reported changes in their assessment repertoire. They began designing a variety of appropriate assessment strategies to enhance student learning:

> The Standards made me change the way I teach. Instead of lecturing, I don't do that anymore, there is discovery. Assessment is hardly ever a test. They show their understanding through projects. Rubrics are big in my class. They need a little bit more nurturing to show what they know (Int C1 #2).

After their own experience with portfolios as a means of assessment, participants began to use them with their own students. One participant explained how this approach influenced the thoroughness of her lesson planning:

> It's helped me think of what it is a student needs to achieve to successfully meet standards. With standards-based education, I have developed rubrics, and found ways to let students know if their work meets, exceeds or does not meet a certain standard. The process has affected me, and I'm more careful to let a class know more in depth what I expect them to accomplish or learn at the beginning of a new unit or lesson, instead of diving right in with the lesson, and reviewing what they have learned after the lesson (Q #14 C1).

New Leadership Roles

Many MLMED participants accepted new leadership roles. They said they felt motivated to participate in school reform, and became class advisors, grade level chairs, focus group leaders, administrators, mentors, and spokespersons for middle level education:

> The Portfolio Standard on leadership helped me personally. I know I need to step outside of my classroom to fulfill this requirement, and I took a very big leadership part in the school. It pushed me to do more things that I really wonder if left alone without this instrument would I have taken the initiative? (Q #13 C1).

Participants seemed to have a drive, almost a mission, to share the Portfolio contents with their school faculties, other university students, parents, and at conferences. The Portfolio served as a professional resource, a place to locate support for middle level education:

> The Portfolio process has given me a chance to share with my colleagues in my team ideas on good and sound teaching practices; more collegiality and sharing of ideas to integrate lessons. Also makes me want to reach out to the other teachers who might need some help in a way that is not demeaning or patronizing and insulting to them. By sharing with them the Portfolio, I know that I am helping them also improve themselves (Q #32 C2).

Alignment with Professional Development Criteria

A third finding was that the MLMED Portfolio process aligns with effective professional development criteria (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Although participants were teaching at different schools, they were able to personalize their portfolios to support and stimulate site-based initiatives at their individual schools, as explained by one participant:

> I liked the idea of the Portfolio assessment for the final project because it allowed me to personalize the whole MLMED experience and tailor it to my needs. It made the whole thing practical and usable. I know I didn't finish my first attempt at a master's degree because I couldn't devote separate time to a thesis and separate research that I might or might not use with frequency once the report was written (Q #31 C1).

The Portfolio process was grounded in knowledge about teaching, the faculty modeled this, coursework was designed to promote use of effective teaching strategies, and participants were held accountable to practice them. The rich discussions about practice and personal exemplars, evidence of student and teacher work, that represent it offered deep engagement with ideas about pedagogy and practice. One participant expressed that, "It was a great tool that required me to think, record, reflect, and analyze what I did, what I do, and what I should do in the future to improve my teaching" (Q #8 C1).

Because the work for the Portfolio was based on personal practice it allowed personalization of the whole MLMED program and made the participants' practice visible, and participants felt respected as professionals and as adult learners. The cohorted structure of the MLMED program, along with the homebase groups with advisors, provided time and follow-up support for participants to learn new skills and integrate them into their practice. A participant explained how he was able to establish an advisory program at his school:

> I was always interested in starting an advisory program at my school. I got really involved and liked how the advisory program met the needs of these unique students. I found more material through the MLMED Program to support what I was doing. It also gave me a contact whom I used to set up TRIBES training for the teachers to give them the skills to be more effective advisors. It made me feel more confident that I am a good teacher and that I can make a difference because I am doing all these good things in my class and through the wrestling program (Q #15 C2).

Portfolio as Part of MLMED Program

Within the Portfolio process, participants specified the features in the Portfolio which promoted improvement of their educational practices: a standards-based focus; the requirement to develop a preliminary Vision Statement and summative Précis; and the requirement to show evidence of accomplished middle level practice in a cogent way.

The Vision Statement, a requirement written in the first summer of the Program, that eventually became part of the participants' Portfolio Précis, established a perspective of professional growth; growth from the past, as well as anticipated growth. One participant explained the impact of the assignment and wrote, "I really grew a lot -it pointed out where I've been, where I'm at and where I'm going. Once you start writing your Vision Statement you really start focusing" (Int C2 #1).

Participants also identified features of the MLMED Program that helped them complete their Portfolios: the five Professional Standards for Educators of Early Adolescents; integrated coursework; a supportive learning community; and the Portfolio requirement. Participants encountered some degree of frustration with the process, though this was buffered by the highly prized learning community of advisor, homebase, cohort-mates and prior graduates. Participants said that they needed time to understand the new information in their coursework and the meaning of Standards, and to incorporate this new learning into their pedagogical repertoire, as expressed by one participant, "It is so

overwhelming. It also pointed out some of my areas of weakness. This was something that is not easy to confront" (Q #15 C2).

In the process of struggling with new requirements, however, they had the safety net of their homebase group and an advisor to encourage and guide them, in addition to the camaraderie of others going through similar experiences at their schools.

Learning Community

Participants felt strongly about the importance of the MLMED learning community and credited it most often as contributing to their changed practice. Participants highly regarded the collegial support in understanding the Portfolio Standards, analyzing what they meant, sharing Portfolio artifacts, and discussing how each represented growing competence in the Standards. This collegial support also provided a safe base to vent frustrations and address confusion over the Portfolio requirements as expressed by this participant:

> The homebase group was essential to me by their encouragement and support. The MLMED Portfolio was so in depth and so broad that I thought I just couldn't finish it, however, the cohort (especially the homebase group) continued to work through the confusion and details together until step by step I finished it (Q #24 C1).

Faculty provided cognitive as well as moral support throughout the Portfolio process. Their feedback was frequently sought and highly valued as this participant stated:

> Supportive advisor who is very knowledgeable and was there to guide in a caring manner. She was able to relate to all of us, treated us as her colleagues, and inspired us all to complete the MLMED Program (Q #33 C1).

The data analyses suggest that the Portfolio provides a mechanism to integrate the MLMED participants' learning. The Portfolio defines their struggles for self-definition as accomplished middle

level educators. Once completed, the Portfolio becomes a medium of exchange, a prized middle level currency.

Discussion

In the motivation it provides for teachers to scrutinize the quality of teacher performance against standards, a portfolio provides an effective way to encourage pre-service and in-service teachers to pursue the possibility of themselves not just as better teachers within the classroom, but as change agents in school renewal and reform efforts as well. With the schools of the United States repeatedly reviewed as needing reform, the potential of the portfolio to create change agents merits further exploration and research.

Professional Development for Teachers

Professional development for teachers becomes an increasingly vital issue with teachers in short supply, and for those who choose teaching, new requirements emerging for them to demonstrate their qualifications. The context of teaching has dramatically changed in the last two decades and will continue to do so even more in the future. A short list of these changes includes: increase in the number of poor families, legally required accommodations for special needs students (frequently without the additional funds to accomplish this), increased ethnic and language differences, pressure of standards-based education (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). These conditions pose a critical need for both more teachers and on-going professional development of teachers. This study indicates the potential of the portfolio to create greater job satisfaction via greater sense of teacher professional competence, and in turn raises the possibilities for greater teacher retention. When held up to criteria for successful professional development (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) the MLMED Portfolio and others like it have the potential to support professional development as a means of educational reform.

Understandings of Professional Standards

Participants indicated that a paradigm shift occurred with the introduction of MLMED Portfolio Standards. The idea that educators needed to present evidence of their competence relative to standards that included evidence of student accomplishments represented a new kind of practice. Now teachers must provide not only evidence of their own professionalism, but evidence of student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). This burden of proof has been made more imperative by newly established federal testing standards for grades three through eight linking federal funding to student performances (House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2001). This situation requires teachers to show their students' results as well as their own ability to meet teacher standards. In an era of federal funding predicated on student performance on standardized tests, and a growing number of teachers who know their standards well via the portfolio process, school systems must still face the prospect of students falling below federal test requirements. When that happens, school systems will have to investigate assumptions underlying the validity of standardized tests, teacher standards, or the portfolio process as a means of inculcating standards for teachers. They will also have to establish the cause-and-effect relationships between teachers who can demonstrate success with teacher standards, and their students succeeding with mandated standardized tests. With so much riding on the outcomes of standardized tests, this area will prove a rich one for subsequent research.

The MLMED's Standards-based Portfolio process required not just the systematic documentation of selected attributes of one's practice, but an understanding of the standards of one's profession as well. In the Portfolio process, participants encountered the Professional Standards for Educators of Early Adolescents (P.D. Deering & Port, 1995) for the first time. They grappled with their understanding of the competencies embedded in the Standards, and were subsequently able to hold their practice up to these guidelines. In some cases, this process confirmed the value of the work they were already accomplishing, and in others, it motivated them to develop new skills for their teaching repertoire in

order to fulfill the requirements of the Standards. The validation of the quality of work accomplished may only appear when the records of student achievement bear out a clear link with teacher practices.

With increased demand for teacher accountability and resulting student achievement, we are called upon to find effective models for professional development of teachers. This study documents the perceived positive affect of a teaching portfolio on the knowledge and practices of teachers, and although research is yet to be conducted regarding direct benefit to students, influence on students is accomplished through "their positive affect on the knowledge and practices of teachers" (Guskey & Sparks, 2002, p. 3).

The destiny of our society will be determined in our schools. In the infinite number of variables that influence America's schools and teachers, a standards-based teacher portfolio holds the potential for improving the professional competence of teachers and in turn student achievement.

APPENDIX MLMED Professional Standards for Educators of Early Adolescents

1. Thorough knowledge and acceptance of, and inquiry into, the nature and needs of early adolescents in the: (a) biological, (b) psychological and (c) social realms; and an (d) understanding of how middle level schooling attempts to address them.
2. Sufficient content preparation to: (a) lead in-depth study in major subject area(s); and to (b) make well-founded linkages to other academic and exploratory areas.
3. Ability to (a) design, implement and assess developmentally-appropriate curriculum and pedagogy which emphasizes holistic learning, exploration, interdisciplinary organization, and active, successful learning for students with (b) diverse interests, abilities, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
4. Able to effectively apply sound (a) communication, (b) management and (c) counseling skills to address the highly demanding and diverse needs of early adolescents in instructional and guidance capacities, to develop communities of learning, and to (d) collaborate effectively with students, parents, community members and colleagues.
5. A commitment to being outstanding professional middle level educators, including: (a) exercising leadership in instruction and schooling; (b) constantly examining and improving upon one's work; (c) able to interpret and critique a variety of research methodologies, and capable of utilizing at least one.

References

Babbie, E. (2001). *The practice of social research* (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods (3rd ed).* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Brooks, J., & Brooks, M. (1993). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century.* New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2000). *Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium.* Retrieved March 6, 2000, from http://www.ccsso.org/nextsteps.html

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

Danielson, C., & McGreal, T. (2000). *Teacher evaluation to enhance professional practice.* Alexandria. VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. (1995). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76,* 597-604.

Deering, P. D. (1997). The masters degree in secondary education with a middle level emphasis: Transforming middle level education in Hawaii. *Educational Perspectives, 31*(1), 12-16.

Deering, P. D. (1998). Promoting teacher leadership in middle level education in Hawaii. *Center Correspondent, 14,* 11-15.

Deering, P. D., Black, R., Davidson, D., DeBaryshe, B., Pateman, B., & Stone, T. (1999). M.Ed. in secondary education with a middle level emphasis--MLMED portfolio assessment plan. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies.

Deering, P. D., & Port, A. (1995). *Master of education degree in secondary education with a middle level education emphasis, University of Hawai'i-Manoa*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i-Manoa and the Hawai'i School University Partnership.

Freidus, H. (1998). Mentoring portfolio development. In N. Lyons (Ed.), *With portfolio in hand: Validating the new teacher professionalism* (pp. 51-68). New York: Teachers College Press.

Grant, G. E., & Heubner, T. A. (1998). The portfolio question: The power of self-directed inquiry. In N. Lyons (Ed.), *With portfolio in hand: Validating the new teacher professionalism* (pp. 156-171). New York: Teachers College Press.

Guskey, T., & Sparks, D. (2002). *Linking professional development to improvements in student learning*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New, Orleans, LA.

House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff. (2001). *ESEA Reform Bill*. Retrieved March 25, 2002, from http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/eseainfo.html

Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. (1998). Data management and analysis methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 179-210). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jackson, A., & Davis, G. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st century*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2000). *Educational research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2000). Teaching and teacher development: A new synthesis for a new century. In R. Brandt (Ed.), *Education in a new era* (pp. p. 47-67). Alexandria. VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lyons, N. (1998a). Constructing narratives for understanding: Using portfolio interviews to scaffold teacher reflection. In N. Lyons (Ed.), *With portfolio in hand: Validating the new teacher professionalism* (pp. 103-119). New York: Teachers College Press.

Lyons, N. (1998b). Portfolios and their consequences: Developing as a reflective practitioner. In N. Lyons (Ed.), *With portfolio in hand: Validating the new teacher professionalism* (pp. 247-264). New York: Teachers College Press.

Lyons, N. (Ed.). (1998c). *With portfolio in hand: Validating the new teacher professionalism*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Marzano, R. (2000). 20th century advances in instruction. In R. Brandt (Ed.), *Education in a new era* (pp. 67-95). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morse, J., & Field, P. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for health professionals* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (1987). *What teachers should know and be able to do*, from http://www.nbpts.org/nbpts/standards/intro.html

National Middle School Association. (1995). *This we believe*. Columbus, OH: NMSA.

National Middle School Association. (1997). *NMSA/NCATE approved curriculum guidelines handbook*. Columbus, OH: NMSA.

Wolf, K. (1999). *Leading the professional portfolio process*. Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Training and Publishing.

Yin, R. (1993). *Applications of case study research* (Vol. 34). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

TM035324

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC Educational Resources Information Center

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Middle Level Teacher Preparation: The Impact of the Portfolio Experience on Teacher's Professional Development	
Author(s): Anne N. Ashford Paul D. Deering	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date:

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☒

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: Anne N Ashford	Printed Name/Position/Title: Anne N. Ashford, PhD	
Organization/Address: 91-649 Puamaeole St. #314 Ewa Beach, HI 96706	Telephone: 808 322-2662	FAX:
	E-Mail Address: aashford@pixi.com	Date: 8-10-03

(Over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
1129 SHRIVER LAB
COLLEGE PARK, MD 20742-5701
ATTN: ACQUISITIONS

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)